

Washington Update September 13, 2019

Dear Colleagues:

Congress is back in session, and bi-partisanship is increasingly looking to be something we see only in the rear-view mirror.

1. Senate Fails to Move Education Funding Bill

The Senate Appropriations Committee, often considered one of the last bastions of bi-partisanship, fell apart this week – and along with it hope for passage of a Senate Labor/HHS/Education bill any time soon. In a surprise last-minute move, the scheduled Tuesday subcommittee markup for the Labor/HHS/Education spending bill was canceled. Republicans claimed that Sen. Patty Murray's (D-WA) intention to offer an amendment blocking President Trump's limitation of services offered under Title X (most notably abortion services offered by Planned Parenthood) violates the bipartisan budget agreement. That agreement prohibits "poison pill" riders on appropriations bills. Democrats argued that including funding for the President's border wall in the Homeland Security Appropriations bill is likewise a poison pill. Thus, the Tuesday Subcommittee markup was cancelled.

On Thursday the full Senate Appropriations Committee met. The polite but partisan meeting featured a further schism between Republicans and Democrats. Republicans have diverted \$5 billion in anticipated funds for the Labor/HHS/Education bill to the Homeland Security bill to fund the President's border wall. Democrats, led by Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-VT), supported moving the majority of those funds back into the Labor/HHS/Education bill while Republicans opposed it – thus the Republicans prevailed (by one vote) and money for the wall remains. Another partisan vote yielded passage of the Defense Appropriations Bill with no Democratic support.

The future for Senate consideration of a Labor/HHS/Education bill appears bleak. With the September 30 deadline for funding around the corner, both the House and Senate are expected to take up "Continuing Resolutions" which will keep the government funded at the current levels for a temporary period of time. It could well be that we are now so deep into election year politics that bi-partisanship will only continue to diminish, meaning little will be accomplished within the next year. Note that the Congress will be in session only about 40 days between now and the end of the year, further squeezing opportunities for progress.

2. Student Financial Aid and Social Emotional Learning in the Spotlight in House Hearings

- House Committee on Financial Services Hearing: **A \$1.5 Trillion Crisis: Protecting Student Borrowers and Holding Student Loan Servicers Accountable**

A background memo developed by Committee staff and available through the link below highlights a few key and troubling facts about the student debt crisis:

- At \$1.6 trillion student loan debt surpasses auto loan debt (\$1.17 trillion) and credit card debt (\$868 billion)
- 44.7 million people carry student debt averaging \$32, 731
- The after-inflation cost of attending college rose by 48.1% between 2003 and 2017

- The cost to attend a four-year university increased almost 8 times faster than wages between 1989 and 2006
- In 2018, 20% of those in repayment for student loans were behind in payments
- Student loan debt disproportionately hits students of color with black students taking on 85% more debt than white students and, thus, having higher default rates
- 59% of students reported unclear guidance about their repayment options from their loan servicers
- The Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program (used by teachers) has been fraught with challenges; for example, 99% of people who apply have been rejected

Numerous bills have been introduced in the House to address a range of these challenges. They are listed in the memo which can be accessed by the link below.

See: <https://financialservices.house.gov/calendar/eventsingle.aspx?EventID=404230>

- **House Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education Hearing: The Importance of Trauma-Informed Practices in Education to Assist Students Impacted by Gun Violence and Other Adversities**

The hearing can be viewed and witness statements downloaded at the link below. Witnesses were:

- **Ms. Nadine Burke Harris, MD, MPH, FAAP**
[California Surgeon General](#)
- **Ms. Ingrida Barker, Ed.D.**
Associate Superintendent
McDowell County Schools
Welch, WV
- **Ms. Joy Hofmeister**
[Oklahoma State Superintendent of Public Instruction](#)
- **Ms. Janice K. Jackson, Ed.D.**
[Chief Executive Officer](#)
Chicago Public Schools

See: <https://edlabor.house.gov/hearings/the-importance-of-trauma-informed-practices-in-education-to-assist-students-impacted-by-gun-violence-and-other-adversities>

Resources on building a trauma sensitive school:

http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/teaching_now/2019/09/almost_everyone_who_applied_for_public_service_loan_forgiveness_was_denied_report_finds.html

3. ED 2020 Coalition Pushes Democratic Presidential Candidates to Comprehensively Address Education

A broad coalition of national education and related organizations have come together to push Democratic presidential candidates to address education matters. Called Education 2020 or ED2020, the group is being supported by the National Public Education Support Fund. Participating organizations include the Center for American Progress, the Consortium of Citizens with Disabilities Education Task Force, The Education Trust, the Learning Policy Institute, NAACP and the Institute for College Access and Success.

Daniel Leeds, chair of ED202, said “We need a universally accessible, comprehensive approach that gives every American the opportunity to lead a successful life—from birth through lifelong learning.” In addition to a set of principles, the group released a “briefing book” which is made up of sets of recommendations by each of the participating organizations or coalitions. The shortage of qualified teachers is particularly addressed by the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities Education Task Force and the Learning Policy Institute.

Politico reports the following response from ED2020 about last night’s debate:

"This debate showed us that presidential candidates are moving in the right direction when it comes to offering a comprehensive vision for birth-through-career education in this country. But we need all candidates to send a strong national message about the importance of strengthening education," said Laura Schifter, policy director at Education 2020.

See: <http://www.ed2020.org/principles/>

4. New Resources for Educators

- **Ed Week** has put together a compilation of articles *Responding to Teacher Shortages* <https://fs24.formsite.com/edweek/images/Spotlight-Teacher-Shortages-2019-Sponsored.pdf>
- **Ed Week article on diversifying the special education workforce** <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2019/09/11/the-push-to-get-more-teachers-of.html>

All the best for a lovely weekend. It looks to be finally cooling off in DC! A much welcome relief from a very hot summer.

See you on twitter @janewestdc

Best, Jane